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ABSTRACT

The Twentieth Century Fund is currently suggesting a National News Council (tentatively scheduled to be in operation by the end of 1973), which would be independent of both the government and the craft of journalism and would report to the public both on the accuracy of news coverage and on the threat, real and potential, against freedom of the press. Originally proposed in 1947 by the Hutchins Commission, but never implemented, the idea gained renewed interest in the late 1960s. Its scope would be limited to national suppliers of news: wire services, "supplemental" news services, weekly news magazines, newspaper syndicates, daily newspapers, and broadcasting networks. The council has not gone unopposed. Many in the news media view the council as an apparatus to intensify external control over journalism and serve in the role of unofficial news censor. Other problems involve the council's definition of news and its purview of national suppliers of news. Whether the council succeeds depends upon its first year performance, the positions it will take on government-press relationships, and the support of its membership. (HOD)

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PRESS COUNCILS: IDEA AND REALITY

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PRESS COUNCILS: IDEA AND REALITY

All segments of the American press have reacted to the idea of a national press council for a quarter of a century. This year, the idea will become a reality.

It seems likely that the National News Council, initiated and sponsored by the Twentieth Century Fund, will be in operation sometime during the latter part of 1973. Funding for at least one year is assured, the 15 press and public members are being recruited and enough "suppliers" of national news have agreed to cooperate to make the plan a viable one.

Unlike press councils in other nations, the National News Council will exist outside the press structure. Thus, whether it survives as a permanent American institution will depend upon its degree of acceptance by the press. Many newspapers and some broadcasters have already stated their attitude toward the National News Council. Others are withholding judgment until members of the council have been named, or until they can observe the organization's procedures.

This paper will attempt to give a summary of the press council's history and the arguments that have been presented both for and against its existence in the United States.

I. THE PRESS COUNCIL IDEA IN AMERICA

In its now-famous report in 1947, the Hutchins Commission saw a trend toward press monopoly and a consequent reduction in sources of ideas and information. As one of its numerous recommendations, it proposed the "establishment of a new and independent agency to appraise and

report annually upon the performance of the press." The agency was to be independent of both government and the press and was intended to consider primarily the broader issues of press freedom and press responsibility.

The late William Benton made a similar proposal for radio and television in 1951. But his commission would have been created by an act of Congress, with the commission members appointed by the President of the United States. It would have had no power except to launch studies and issue reports.

During the next 20 years, proposals were repeatedly made (and usually killed for lack of a second) for some sort of national press council or commission to serve as a watchdog over print and electronic media. The names of those suggesting press commissions included Harry Ashmore, J. Edward Gerald, Ben Bagdikian, Lee Loevinger, Edward R. Murrow, Barry Bingham and Pierre Salinger.

Local Press Councils

Experiments with local press councils were begun in five small communities in California, Oregon, Illinois and Colorado in the late 1960's. Although they achieved differing degrees of success, they were not considered by most observers to be proper models or proper precedents for a national press council. Local press councils are, in effect, "advisory committees," providing two-way communication between the newspaper and its public. Members of the local council see the total product of the newspaper each day, and they are able to communicate personally with the local editor. On the other hand, national press councils are "critical and appellate" committees. In concept and operation, they are quite different.

For example, the Honolulu Community-Media Council, established in 1970, is basically a discussion group, a forum. But the Minnesota Press Council, established in 1971 with statewide jurisdiction, is more nearly like a national press council. It is an appellate body. It hears complaints. It hands down decision.

Recent Proposals

Within the past five years, activity on the press council idea has increased markedly. A meeting sponsored by the National Institute of Public Affairs in 1968 brought together such people as Benjamin Bradlee, the late Ralph McGill, Sander Vanocur and Nicholas Johnson. This meeting came up with a suggestion for a press council that would be markedly different from press councils abroad and different from those proposed earlier for the United States. It would include broadcasting in its scope, it would limit its purview to "national" media only, it would be composed totally of distinguished non-journalists, and it would be supported by foundations, rather than by the press itself. This idea for a truly "national" press council sought to answer those within the press who had contended that there were too many news media in the U. S. for any one council to survey, and satisfy those outside the press who demanded that a press council be completely independent from both press and government. Although this particular proposal did not go far, the basic ideas were to appear later in the proposal of the Twentieth Century Fund.

The national press council idea received more consideration in 1969. The American Society of Newspaper Editors considered establishing a Grievance Committee--an idea that had gone aglimmering in the 1920's when the society had tried (unsuccessfully) to toss Frederick G. Bonfils of the Denver Post out of the organization for involvement in the Teapot Dome affair. The 1969 proposal, however, did not please all members of the ASNE's executive committee and got no further.*

The Association for Education in Journalism, the organization of journalism professors, went on record in 1969 as favoring the press council idea, and favoring AEJ involvement with its establishment. In the same year, a citizens' group calling itself Accuracy in Media (AIM) decided to form its own press surveillance group to resist what it saw

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*The ASNE polled its members on the idea of a Grievance Committee in 1971. Those returning the questionnaire voted three to one against ASNE's establishing such a committee. They opposed any grievance procedure outside the ASNE.

as American journalism's departure from the standards of objectivity. AIM is considered by many to be a right-wing, vigilante group. It was able to get organized, raise funds, conduct reviews of inaccurate reporting and get its results publicized--although in some instances it had to buy advertisements in the offending newspapers to do so.

In 1970 the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (the Kerner Commission) suggested that a press council be set up as a public watchdog for all news outlets. It recommended that such a council be independent of both media and government, supported by federal taxation and composed of members appointed by the President of the United States.

Within a year, the Twentieth Century Fund was pursuing its own idea of a national press council. And by this time many of the previous nebulous suggestions were converging, coalescing into the thought that the time was ripe for a press council in the U.S., that the council should be national in scope and that it should be established, staffed and supported in such a way that it would be independent of the two giants between whom it was designed to stand--the national press and the federal government.

II. PRESS COUNCILS ABROAD

Press councils are established institutions in Europe. Sweden's press council dates back to 1916. The British Press Council was founded 20 years ago. But most of the dozen and a half press councils now in operation were started in the 1960's and working press councils are now common throughout western Europe. Notable exceptions are Belgium and France, but those two countries are seriously considering the idea. There are also press councils in Israel, South Korea, India, New Zealand, South Africa, Japan, Peru, Taiwan and Turkey.

The Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association rejected the idea of a "national" press council in 1972, primarily because it believed the country was too large, with too many newspapers to survey. However, the CDNPA went on record as favoring press councils set up

by regional groups, and suggested the British Press Council as a model. Press councils have now been established in Quebec, Ontario and Alberta, although all newspapers in each province have not yet agreed to participate.

Press councils abroad were established because of certain basic problems in the print media of the individual countries. These problems mostly fall under the following categories: 1) concentration of ownership, limiting diversity or opinion, 2) unprofessional conduct, 3) sensationalism and intrusion of privacy, 4) failure to publish corrections, 5) influence of advertisers and 6) economic inefficiency of the press.

Virtually all the press councils were formed at the initiative of newsmen and publishers because they feared that a combination of these problems had led to public hostility toward the press and a government threat to enact restrictive legislation.

National press councils throughout the world are alike in the following ways:

---Except for India, where the press council was established by an act of Parliament in 1965, all are voluntary organizations set up by publishers and journalists.

---All receive and consider complaints against publications and journalists.

---Almost all may also speak out regarding threats to press freedom and restrictions on access to information.

---Generally, they may not impose sanctions; their only "force" is reproofs or censures published in the press or trade publications.

---Most press council chairmen are non-journalists, usually distinguished jurists.

---Membership is dominated by journalists. Most press councils now include some representation from the public, ranging from 20 per cent to 33 per cent. No national press council has a majority of laymen. Austria, Germany, Netherlands and South Africa have no public members.

---Usually, the press provides funds to support the council.

---The press council either draws up a code of ethics or builds up a record of case law; complaints are then measured against this code or against established precedents.

---With the exception of Finland, none of the press councils considers broadcasting. It must be remembered that most of these countries have government or publicly owned broadcasting networks. The BBC has established a "Programme Complaints Committee" to consider specific criticism.

The British Press Council

The British Press Council is often held up as a model for other countries. It is well to look briefly at this example.

The British Press Council was established in 1953, under pressure from a Parliament concerned with monopoly and sensationalism in British newspapers. A Royal Commission, established by Parliament, suggested the council. The first British Press Council had no non-journalist members. A second Royal Commission reviewed the activities of the council and recommended that it have more power and some members from the public. As reorganized in 1964, the British Press Council now has 26 members: 12 members named by publishers' associations, 8 members named by journalists' associations, an independent chairman and 5 other non-journalists named by the press members and the chairman. All members are elected for three years, and are eligible for re-election.

The council hears complaints against newspapers and journalists, keeps under review conditions likely to threaten freedom of information, investigates developments tending toward greater monopoly in the press and makes periodic reports to the British public on its own work and developments in the press.

Full council meetings are held at least five times a year; committees meet more frequently. A full-time staff of three professional journalists serves the council. Operating expenses, now amounting to about $70,000 a year, are provided by the journalists' and publishers' associations.

It is the council's policy not to initiate a grievance against a newspaper, but to wait until a complaint is filed. It requires that the complainant first attempt to settle the grievance with the newspaper. It then insists that the complainant waive the right to use any information developed in Press Council hearings in any subsequent libel case. In 446 complaints adjudicated in the last six years, the council upheld the complainant and criticized the newspaper in slightly more than half. Because of the "case law" method of establishing ethical norms, the British Press Council had to judge only 45 of the 497 complaints received in 1970. The others apparently could be quickly settled according to precedents already on the books.

No newspaper is required to publish an adverse adjudication against it, but in almost all cases the newspaper has done so.

Although the idea of a press council faced initial hostility from the British press, especially from publishers, the British Press Council has built a reputation for fairness and concern. Polls and surveys have shown that a majority of British editors and publishers now have a favorable view of the British Press Council, which has been described as a "dog with two heads"--one head barking inward and the other outward.

III. THE TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND PROPOSAL

The Twentieth Century Fund was founded in 1919. In 1971, its Board of Trustees approved setting up a Task Force to examine the feasibility of establishing a press council in the United States. The Task Force was composed of 14 members--nine representatives of the press and five non-journalists. (For names of Task Force members, see Appendix.)

They were apparently brought together out of two major common concerns: 1) diminishing credibility of the news media and 2) escalating threats to press freedom.

The Task Force became convinced that a press council was needed and feasible. It then moved swiftly to do what no similar group had done before: it not only publicly recommended a press council, but designed a

framework for establishing such a press council. The Task Force also laid down these basic principles for the press council (to be called the National News Council): it would be independent of both government and the craft of journalism, and it would report to the public both on the accuracy of news coverage and on threats, real and potential, against freedom of the press.

Like the British Press Council, it would be a two-headed dog, barking inward and outward, but--unlike the British Press Council--it would be a completely independent dog.

The Task Force named Judge Roger Traynor, former chief justice of the California Supreme Court, to head the National News Council (NNC). It also named Judge Traynor head of a "founding committee" (composed of certain members of the Task Force and representatives from supporting foundations) to select NNC's members, design a constitution and establish an initial budget.

It was expected that the National News Council would be organized and in operation "early in 1973." But by the first week of April, 1973, the founding committee had not yet announced the names of NNC members, or the specifics of its constitution. An announcement was made, however, that $400,000 had been committed, assuring funding for NNC's first year of operation, and that a total of $1 million was being sought from various foundations to assure financing of NNC over the next three years.

This much, however, is already known about the structure and procedures of NNC:

Membership: 15 members; 9 non-journalists and 6 journalists; chairman will always be a non-journalist; no member shall be affiliated with a principal nationwide suppliers of news; term of office will be three years, staggered, with no member being permitted to serve more than two consecutive terms; council will be self-perpetuating, with new members elected by old members from names submitted by the press, the public and foundations.

Funding: initial funding from a consortium of foundations, with not more than 25% of funding coming from any one foundation.

Scope: limited to national suppliers of news, including major wire services, largest "supplemental" news services, national weekly news magazines, national newspaper syndicates, national daily newspapers and nationwide broadcasting networks; grievances limited to fairness and accuracy in news reporting (specifically identified editorial comment will not be considered).

Grievance Procedure: "case method" plan; complainant will be asked to try to resolve grievance with medium first; before complaint will be heard by grievance committee, complainant must agree to waive right to legal proceedings against publication or network; NNC itself may initiate complaints.

Staff Operations: full-time executive director with media experience and professional assistants; staff may engage teams of experts to investigate complaints or may appoint fact-finding task forces.

Enforcement: none; limited to public reporting of NNC decisions.

"National Suppliers of News"

By limiting the scope of the NNC to"national suppliers of news," the Twentieth Century Fund's Task Force accomplished the following: it directed the NNC's attention to the most powerful purveyors of news and information in the United States; it eliminated the long-standing argument that a national press council could never effectively review the thousands of newspapers, magazines and broadcasting stations in the United States; it made most newspapers "onlookers" rather than direct participants in the plan, and thus tended to reduce press hostility to the plan.

The Task Force report declared: "This concentration of nationwide news organizations--like other large institutions--has grown increasingly remote from and unresponsive to the popular constituencies on which they depend and which depend on them."

It was clear that the Task Force wanted to focus attention on the handful of media that provide the overwhelming bulk of national and international news to the American people. This includes AP, UPI, ABC, NBC, CBS, Time, Newsweek, The New York Times News Service, and the Los Angeles Times-Washington Post News Service.

Since the Task Force used the term "national suppliers of news," it had to include in its net the Wall Street Journal, Christian Science Monitor, Public Broadcasting Service and U.S. News & World Report. But it would seem that they are not nearly as concerned about this last group, either because of their more limited circulation or their narrower range of news.

One factor is still unclear in regard to NNC's purview of national suppliers of news. The New York Times News Service comes within its scope, but The New York Times apparently does not. The same can be said of the Los Angeles Times and the Washington Post and their combined news service. All three of these newspapers are more than simply local--or even regional--publications. Will NNC be able to limit complaints only to the output of their wire services when the original news was also published in the newspapers? If a correction or a reply is printed in The New York Times, for example, must it also be sent out over the news service as well; otherwise, could there be a finding against the Times; and what if the correction is not published by subscribing papers? If NNC extends its jurisdiction to all newspapers producing news services or syndicated services (and not just to the services themselves), the "national suppliers of news" concept will be significantly enlarged.

The other interesting aspect that observers will be waiting for NNC to define is the term "news." Clearly labeled editorial comment is excluded, of course, but most of the material produced by syndicated services is neither news nor editorial--it is "interpretation." And one could add that very much produced by the news magazines and the networks is "interpretation," also. Some of it is labeled; a lot of it is not.

Will NNC entertain complaints against "David Brinkley's Journal" or Jack Anderson's syndicated column? Network officials have yet to clearly define what constitutes "interpretation." It will be interesting to see if NNC can.

NNC and the British Model

There are some significant differences between the proposed National News Council and the British Press Council. This is not necessarily bad, because institutions and traditions differ in the two countries, and a press council modeled precisely on the one in England would not automatically achieve the same success. But because Britain has always been held up as the model, it is worthwhile reviewing the differences between the two press councils:

1) NNC will consider broadcasting networks; Britain does not.

2) NNC will consider only national suppliers of news; Britain includes all newspapers (although there are relatively few non-national newspapers in Britain, compared to the U.S.).

3) NNC may initiate complaints against the press; in Britain, the policy is not to do this.

4) NNC funding will come from foundations; Britain's comes from the press.

5) NNC membership will be 60% non-journalist; Britain has only 23% non-journalist.

It is clear from these differences that the British Press Council as an institution represents "self-regulation." Because of its funding, scope and membership, this same term--"self-regulation"--cannot be applied to the National News Council.

IV. REACTION TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND

Although many newspapers have withheld comment about the Task Force's proposal for a National News Council, a number had strong opinions shortly after the Task Force announcement.

The Des Moines Register favored the proposal. It stated: "The communications media have nothing to fear from independent, responsible evaluation of their performance. If the planned press council lives up to the standards set for it in the task force report, formation of the council will be in the interests of a free and responsible press."

At the other end of the spectrum was this comment from the New York Daily News: "This is a sneak attempt at press regulation, a bid for a role as unofficial news censor."

Among the notable supporters of the proposal were the Louisville Courier-Journal, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Milwaukee Journal and J. Edward Murray, president of the ASNE. Vocal opponents included the Boston Globe, the Knight Newspapers, the Scripps-Howard Newspapers and William C. Payette, president of Sigma Delta Chi.

The trade publications had mixed reactions to the Task Force report. Advertising Age said editorially that the "press has nothing to fear from it," and concluded: "A properly structured Press Council could serve the nation honorably." But Broadcasting editorialized that broadcasters should follow the lead of The New York Times in refusing to cooperate with NNC. Broadcasting wrote: "The council would provide a handy apparatus to intensify external control over radio and television journalism. Complaints to the council would inevitably get into license-renewal files and thus become added instruments of broadcast regulation." Editor & Publisher withheld judgment.

Aryeh Neier, director of the American Civil Liberties Union, opposed the basic idea. "Our Constitution and the First Amendment," he said, "presume that no one should be in a position to decide for you and to decide for me what is accurate and what is fair."

Of most interest, however, was the reaction of the 13 largest "national suppliers" that will be most affected by NNC's operations. By mid-year, 1973, their positions were as follows:

Will Cooperate with NNC

The Associated Press
United Press International
Columbia Broadcasting System
Public Broadcasting Service
Time
Newsweek
Wall Street Journal
Christian Science Monitor

Will Not Cooperate with NNC

The New York Times News Service

No Position Announced

American Broadcasting Company
National Broadcasting Company
U.S. News and World Report
Los Angeles Times-Washington Post News Service

It must be added, with emphasis, that the media included in the "will cooperate" category have differing attitudes toward NNC. The Public Broadcasting Service, Christian Science Monitor and CBS appear to be enthusiastic. Some of the others are actually hostile to the entire idea, but say they will "answer questions" put to them by NNC, as they would to any other individual or organization.

Time Inc., for example, complained that NNC would give the illusion that the nation's magazines, newspapers and radio and TV news departments were a single institution, unified in thought and opinion. Warren Phillips, president of Dow Jones, which publishes the Wall Street Journal, said: "We think that our record over many years demonstrates

that we do not require help from a self-appointed, quasi-public committee to continue to do this job and serve the public interest."

So far, only The New York Times has said it would not cooperate with NNC in any way. There was a conflict in the Times family, since one member of the Task Force had been John B. Oakes, editorial page editor of the Times. Thus, rather than state the Times' decision in an editorial, publisher Arthur O. Sulzberger declared it in a memorandum to staff members. He said that submitting to "voluntary regulation" could actually "harm the cause of press freedom in the United States." He added that the Times "will not be a party to their investigations, nor will we furnish information or explanations to the council."

Although not yet stating an official position, both NBC and ABC have criticized formation of the NNC. They see the NNC as just one more organization to second-guess and harass newsmen.

The Los Angeles Times-Washington Post News Service will make a decision on the NNC later this spring. But it is interesting to note that while the Washington Post has said it will "answer questions" from the NNC, the Los Angeles Times has attacked the entire concept of a national press council--and Robert Keith, editor of the news service, has said: "It's an interesting experiment. I don't see why we wouldn't cooperate. It might do some good."

At this point, it appears that the council will surely have enough cooperation, albeit grudging in some cases, to make grievance proceedings meaningful--at least during the first year. And, obviously, the NNC will be able to investigate many grievances even if the affected media refuse to cooperate.

V. ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST A NATIONAL PRESS COUNCIL

Certain arguments for and against a national press council are heard more frequently than others. The major arguments on each side are listed below, with the response to each argument immediately following.

Arguments For a National Press Council

--National suppliers of news are remote and aloof. It is almost impossible for a citizen treated unfairly by one of them to lodge an effective complaint. Response: A "national" news medium has an extremely large audience. It does not have the room to publish every letter or to honor every trivial request for a retraction. A press council will not change the size of the audience or the amount of space available for letters and corrections.

--Press councils enhance media credibility. They may convince people that the press is not as wantonly arrogant and inept as it sometimes appears. Response: To the contrary, press councils focus attention unduly on shortcomings of the press. Since NNC will turn its attention exclusively to the national news media, it may convince many people that these are the worst media in the country--when in fact they are the best. Have national business corporations become more credible now that we have consumer protection agencies?

--The National News Council will not be associated with government and will have no coercive powers. It could hardly constitute a threat to the liberty of the press. And certainly real newsmen are not intimidated by anyone. Response: NNC will serve as grand jury, prosecuting attorney, jury and judge. Its powers of publicity will be coercion enough, and the effect will be to make media less aggressive and less outspoken--at a time when both qualities should be encouraged.

--A respected press council with members of stature can defend the press as few other groups can. The existence of a voluntary regulatory body tends to forestall government regulation. Response: This may be

true, but is there a threat of government regulation? Congress seems to be anxious to protect press freedom. On the other hand, a "voluntary" group that has the power to make things better also has the power to make things worse. A relatively free press may find itself being "voluntarily" regulated into a less free press.

--Press councils have been successful in other countries, and the overwhelming majority of newsmen now favor them. Response: The situation of the press in every country is different. The British Press Council, for example, was established by the press after the press became convinced that there was a need for such a council. U.S. newsmen are not convinced that conditions in this country warrant establishing a press council.

Arguments Against a Press Council

--The Twentieth Century Fund is putting the cart before the horse. It is establishing a press council before there is proof there is a need for one, or before there is any clear idea precisely what it can expect to accomplish. Compare this to the Royal Commissions in England, which made long and detailed studies of the press before recommending a press council. Response: The Hutchins Commission made detailed studies of the press situation in the United States 26 years ago and recommended a press commission. The Hutchins group's recommendations were ignored by the press. Meanwhile, the credibility of all media in the United States has fallen to an all-time low, according to recent Harris Polls. If nothing else, this should indicate that there is a need for an institution that can raise the standards of press performance and renew the public's faith in the press.

--Adequate machinery for review of press performance already exists. Press institutes and journalism reviews keep constant watch on the production of the print and electronic media, and let the ax fall when standards are compromised. In addition, the competent editor has his own press council, composed of his readers or viewers. Response:

Journalism reviews have limited circulation and limited impact. The findings of NNC will be widely disseminated and will be of interest to a broader audience. As for the ordinary citizen, he frequently needs the help of people more knowledgeable about the media to define the standards that he should expect.

--NNC may look innocuous enough, no real threat to press freedom. But it is a foot in the door. It will start with a few "national" media, then extend its jurisdiction to cover many more media. There is nothing wrong with self-scrutiny. But there is a danger in institutionalizing that scrutiny, because there will be constant pressure to make the institution stronger. until it can eventually tell the press what it can and cannot do. Response: NNC is only an experiment. Publishers and editors are overreacting to it, just as they did to the Hutchins Commission report in 1947. Eventually, the press did on its own almost everything the Hutchins Commission had had the foresight to suggest.

--The New York Times vs. Sullivan decision of 1964 freed the press from the threat of libel suits from politicians. Now these politicians will try to harass the press through the back door, via NNC. The irony is that these same politicians already have greater access to news outlets than the average citizen. Response: Perhaps politicians deserve protection from irresponsible and erroneous news reporting as much as any other citizen. If the complaint is not justified, the press council can easily decline to hear it.

--The National News Council will be an elitist group, bringing elitist and non-journalistic standards to bear on the popular press. Robust and extravagant investigation and interpretation will be forced to heel to the standards set by this "responsible" establishment. With press members in the minority in the NNC, the press surely will not be judged by its journalistic peers. Response: The public has a vested interest in the behavior of the press. The press cannot assert its own right to probe into every cranny of society and at the same time refuse to have its own standards examined by the public. In addition, NNC will speak out with much greater

authority in defense of the press simply because it is recognized as not being dominated by journalists or journalistic institutions.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Many newsmen would agree that a credibility gap exists between the mass media and the public. But newsmen might question whether the National News Council can do anything to narrow the gap.

To some extent, diminished credibility is a result of the revolutionary times in which we live. There is distrust of all institutions that have become larger, more bureaucratic and more remote--and these characteristics fit the established press as well as other businesses.

Television, radio and newspapers now offer increasing amounts of investigative and interpretative material--enlightening some, but assaulting the prejudices of others.

The national suppliers of news reach audiences of widely variant tastes. Unlike local media, they cannot appeal to narrow regional, ethnic and economic interests. Thus, they often appear "unfair."

And the audience itself is not only better educated and more sophisticated, but goes to a wide variety of media each day for its information and probably hears slightly different accounts of the same story from each medium. This is a good situation, not a bad one, but it is probably not designed to make the media more credible.

Thus, from the point of view of the press, NNC will be least successful in the "grievance"area. For the press sees the "credibility gap" as a natural consequence of changing journalistic methods and large, heterogeneous audiences.

The advantage to the press may well be NNC's ability to step forth as a powerful and independent voice in behalf of press freedom.

It seems clear that NNC, as proposed, will be something very different from the press councils already established abroad. If the press is the "fourth branch" of government, then NNC apparently hopes

to become a "fifth branch."

We must picture in our mind's eye powerful national media on one side, powerful centralized government on the other side, and now a powerful national press council in the middle. Because that is what NNC is designed to be, an institution primarily responsible to the public--rather than to the press or the government. And it is also designed to be an institution that packs a powerful punch--whose criticisms and recommendations cannot be easily ignored by either the press or government.

If it can keep the government at bay, it may win support from the skeptics. If it takes a militant "consumerist" stance toward the press, it may lose some of its supporters. The press, certainly, will be waiting to see if NNC can establish the validity of the basic thesis of its founders--that it can and will serve to strengthen the channels of communication.

NNC's independence from the press may be a potential weakness. Since it is not sponsored by the press, the press may have no real commitment to support it and cooperate with it. Because it is unauthorized, NNC has no monopoly and might face competition from other, equally unauthorized, press councils.

Its domination by "public" members might also invite the same sort of press hostility directed toward the Hutchins Commission, which contained not one professional journalist.

Whether the National News Council can establish itself as a "fifth branch of government," to be taken seriously by the press and government, will depend upon its membership, the sort of grievances it agrees to hear during its first year of operation and the positions it takes on government-press relationships.

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APPENDIX

MEMBERS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND TASK FORCE

Press Members:

Barry Bingham Sr., Chairman of the Board
Louisville Courier-Journal

Stimson Bullitt, President
King Broadcasting Company, Seattle

Hodding Carter III, Editor
The Delta Democrat Times, Greenville, Miss.

Robert Chandler, Editor
The Bulletin, Bend, Ore.

Hartford N. Gunn Jr., President
Public Broadcasting System

Richard Harwood, Assistant Managing Editor
The Washington Post

Louis Martin, Editor
Chicago Defender

John B. Oakes, Editorial Page Editor
The New York Times

Richard Salant, President
CBS News

Public Members:

Lucy Wilson Benson, President (co-chairman)
League of Women Voters

Ithiel de Sola Pool, Professor of Political Science
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

C. Donald Peterson, Justice (co-chairman)
Minnesota Supreme Court

Paul Reardon, Associate Justice
Supreme Judicial Court, Boston

Jesse Unruh
Los Angeles

The Freedom of Information Foundation at Columbia, Missouri, is being strengthened through the financial assistance of several journalistic organizations. They include the National Association of Broadcasters, the American Broadcasting Company, The Columbia Broadcasting System, the National Broadcasting Company, the American Newspaper Publishers Association, and the ANPA Foundation.

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